and build on our progress in other areas, such as ensuring full access for U.S. beef to the Korean market.

And I look forward to working with Congress and leaders in both parties to approve this pact. Because if there's one thing Democrats and Republicans should be able to agree on, it should be creating jobs and opportunity for our people.

Which brings me to the other issue I want to address. Earlier today the Senate voted on two provisions to extend tax cuts for the middle class. And I'll admit, I am very disappointed that the Senate did not pass legislation that had already passed the House of Representatives to make middle class tax cuts permanent. Those provisions should have passed. I continue to believe that it makes no sense to hold tax cuts for the middle class hostage to permanent tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans, especially when those high income tax cuts would cost an additional $700 billion that we don't have and would add to our deficit.

But with so much at stake, today's votes cannot be the end of the discussion. It is absolutely essential to our hard-working middle class families and to our economy to make sure that their taxes don't go up on January 1.

I've spoken with the Democratic leadership in Congress, and I look forward to speaking with the Republican leadership as well. And my message to them is going to be the same: We need to redouble our efforts to resolve this impasse in the next few days to give the American people the peace of mind that their taxes will not go up on January 1. It will require some compromise, but I'm confident that we can get it done. And the American people should expect no less.

As we work our way through this issue, we must not forget that last week some 2 million Americans who have lost their jobs also saw their unemployment insurance expire, right in the middle of the holiday season. And that's not how we should do business here in America. I believe it is simply wrong to even consider giving permanent tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans while denying relief to so many Americans who desperately need it and have lost their jobs through no fault of their own.

So we are going to continue to work on this issue through the weekend, into early next week. And I'm going to be rolling up my sleeves with the leaders of both parties in Congress. We need to get this resolved, and I'm confident we can do it.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:21 p.m. in Room 430 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Deputy National Security Adviser for International Economic Affairs Michael B. Froman.

## Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors Reception
*December 5, 2010*

*The President.* Everybody, thank you so much. Please have a seat, have a seat. Well, what a good-looking crowd. [*Laughter*] Say we do what we can, huh? [*Laughter*] Happy holidays, everybody. And on behalf of Michelle and myself, I want to welcome all of you to the White House.

And I want to start by giving special thanks to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and all the Members of Congress who are here. Nobody has done more for our country over the last couple of years than Nancy Pelosi.

None of this would be possible without some people who have put great effort into this evening: David Rubenstein, Michael Kaiser, the Kennedy Center trustees, and all the people who have made the Kennedy Center such a wonderful place for Americans of all ages to enjoy the arts.

And on that note, I also want to give special thanks to Caroline Kennedy—where's—is Caroline here tonight? Hey, Caroline—and all the other members of the Kennedy family who are here tonight. It's wonderful to see them.

And finally, I want to recognize the Cochairs of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities—my good friend George Stevens.

George and his son Michael are the brains behind the Kennedy Center Honors, and I want to thank them all for their great creativity.

This is a season of celebration and of giving. And that's why it's my greatest privilege as President to honor the five men and women who have given our Nation the extraordinary gift of the arts.

The arts have always had the power to challenge and the power to inspire, to help us celebrate in times of joy and find hope in times of trouble. And although the honorees on this stage each possess a staggering amount of talent, the truth is, they aren't being recognized tonight simply because of their careers as great lyricists or songwriters or dancers or entertainers. Instead, they're being honored for their unique ability to bring us closer together and to capture something larger about who we are, not just as Americans, but as human beings.

That's what Merle Haggard has been doing for more than 40 years. Often called the "poet of the common man," Merle likes to say that he's living proof that things can go wrong in America, but also that things can go right. [*Laughter*]

In a day and age when so many country singers claim to be rambling, gambling outlaws, Merle actually is one. [*Laughter*] He hopped his first freight train at the age of 10 and was locked up some 17 times as a boy, pulling off almost as many escapes.

Later, after becoming a bona fide country star, Merle met Johnny Cash and mentioned that he had seen Cash perform years earlier at San Quentin prison. "That's funny," Cash said, "because I don't remember you being in the show." [*Laughter*] And Merle had to explain to the Man in Black that he hadn't been in the show, he had been in the audience. [*Laughter*]

That performance had inspired Merle to start writing songs, and he's written thousands of them since, about three or four hundred "keepers" in Merle's opinion. Thirty-eight of those songs have been number one on the charts, including "Okie from Muskogee," which he performed for Richard Nixon right here in this room back in 1973.

Through it all, Merle's power has always come from the truth he tells about life and love and everything in between. As he says, "the best songs feel like they've always been there." So tonight we honor a man who feels like he's always been here, Merle Haggard.

Now, growing up in New Jersey, Jerry Herman and his family used to play Broadway tunes in the living room: Jerry on the piano, his mother on the accordion, and his father playing the sax. And he never took a music lesson, but always had the ability to play anything he heard by ear.

Then, when he was 14, Jerry went to see the great Ethel Merman perform in "Annie Get Your Gun." In his words, "I got a load of that great lady and was gone." [*Laughter*] Jerry was determined to be a songwriter, even though he didn't think he could ever make a career out of doing something that was so much fun.

But that's exactly what he's done, penning songs for such iconic musicals as "Hello, Dolly!" and "La Cage aux Folles" and drawing audiences everywhere out of their seats and into the world of his imagination. Those songs earned Jerry a shelf full of Tonys, and he's still the only composer and lyricist to have had three shows on Broadway at the same time.

Today, that same kid from Jersey City is still doing what he loves. As Jerry says, "I never wanted to do anything but make people hum." So thank you, Jerry, for doing just that. Jerry Herman.

If Jerry Herman wanted to make people hum, Bill T. Jones wanted to open their eyes and make them move. The youngest of 12 children, Bill's parents were migrant workers—"poorer than poor"—who made a living picking fruits and vegetables up and down the East Coast. Early on, Bill struggled to find his identity in a segregated world where he often felt like he didn't belong.

Then he began to dance. Bill likes to say that a good dancer has "heart, guts, strength, intelligence, and personality," and he's been blessed with plenty of each. As the cofounder of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Bill has

earned widespread acclaim and artistic success in the hypercompetitive world of modern dance, all while battling poverty and homophobia and racism.

His unique performances have always been provocative, challenging audiences to confront important issues in a way that is at once captivating, agitating, and extremely personal. To date, he's created over 140 works on subjects ranging from terminal illness to Abraham Lincoln, securing his place as one of the most decorated and controversial choreographers of our time.

And through it all, Bill has never compromised his sense of purpose or lost his ability to inspire others to greater heights. "I'm not afraid to stand up," Bill once said. "I'm not afraid to be looked at. Making my art is a way of saying to people—gay people, HIV-positive people—that life is worth it." And for that, we are forever grateful. Bill T. Jones.

Now, there's not a lot that I can tell you about our next honoree that you don't already know. I can tell you he's become something of a regular here at the White House. We decided we would just give him all possible awards this year. [*Laughter*]

So this summer, Paul McCartney was here to accept the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song. It was a thrill of a lifetime to hear him sing "Michelle" to Michelle. Although apparently, Paul joked afterwards that he was worried he might become the "first guy ever to get punched out by the President." [*Laughter*]

I will say he was a little emotive during the song. [*Laughter*] I can't afford another one. [*Laughter*] You have nothing to worry about. I just recovered from my last tussle on the basketball court. [*Laughter*]

And so tonight I am pleased once again to honor a man widely considered to be among the greatest songwriters in history. Paul first picked up a guitar at age 14, and soon it never left his side. Homework went undone, my understanding is. Comics went unread. He would play it in the bathroom.

It wasn't long before he gravitated towards other young musicians who shared his passion, including a young man named John Lennon. But when Paul and his bandmates played their first set in a hole-in-the-wall jazz club in England, expectations were still low: They thought they'd be pretty big in Liverpool.

That band went on to change the way the world thought about music. Their songs were the soundtrack for an era of immense creativity and change. And when Paul continued his musical journey alone after the Beatles broke up, he would become one of the few performers inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame twice, as a Beatle and as a solo artist.

Now, Paul admits that the only possible explanation is supernatural. He says, "The most important ingredient to making a song work is magic. You've got a melody, you've got words, but on the most successful songs, there's a sort of magic glow that just makes the songs sort of roll out."

We may not understand it, Paul, but for the last five decades, you've taken millions of fans on a pretty magical ride. And I should point out, that includes a whole new generation. When Malia and Sasha were here—remember, Michelle? We went upstairs, and she said, "That song 'Penny Lane,' that's a really neat song." [*Laughter*] And she started trying to play it on our piano upstairs. And so you continue to inspire, all those years since Liverpool. Thank you, Paul McCartney.

And what can I say about our final honoree? Michelle and I love Oprah Winfrey. [*Laughter*] Personally love this woman. And the more you know Oprah, the more spectacular you realize her character and her soul are and the more you appreciate what a wonderful, gifted person she is.

It's easy to forget sometimes that Oprah was once a girl with a funny name—[*laughter*]—in a little town down South. Back then, nobody would have ever dreamed that she would become someone who moves an entire nation each and every day. But the signs were there.

After 2 days of kindergarten, Oprah wrote a note to her teacher that read: "I don't think I belong here because I know a lot of big words." [*Laughter*] Her teacher agreed, and she moved on to the first grade.

And while she was working as a reporter in Baltimore, Oprah was told she was too engaged and too emotional about her stories, so the

station put her on a talk show to run out her contract. That worked well. [*Laughter*] How's payback? [*Laughter*] That planted the seed for what would become the highest rated talk show in American television history.

Oprah's gift—as a host, as a producer, as an Oscar-nominated actress—has always been her ability to relate to her audience, to laugh with us, to cry with us, to draw us in and connect our most fervent hopes and deepest fears to her own. The reason we share ourselves with Oprah is because she shares herself with us: her childhood of abuse, her personal battles, her life as a woman, as an African American, as someone who is determined to confront both great injustices of the world and the private struggles of everyday life.

She has taught us to find strength in overcoming, to take a stand for ourselves and what we know is right. And she has shown millions of people around the world—people she probably will never meet—what it means to believe in "the dream of your own life." Oprah Winfrey.

So Merle Haggard, Jerry Herman, Bill T. Jones, Paul McCart—what's your name again?—[*laughter*]—Paul McCartney, Oprah Winfrey. Their lives and their stories as are——

[*At this point, a cell phone rang.*]

*The President.* Who's calling? [*Laughter*]

——are as diverse as any you can imagine. Yet in their own way, each of these honorees help us understand the human experience—to illuminate our past, to help us understand our present, and to give us the courage to face our future.

Being here with tonight's honorees, reflecting on their contributions, I'm reminded of a Supreme Court opinion by the great Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. In a case argued before the Court in 1926, the majority ruled that the State of New York couldn't regulate the price of theater tickets because, in the opinion of the majority, the theater was not a public necessity. They argued, in effect, that the experience of attending the theater was superfluous. And this is what Justice Holmes had to say: "Too many people," he wrote in his dissent, "the"—let me start that over. "To many people, the superfluous—superfluous"—it's this lip that's—[*laughter*]—it's hard to say. [*Laughter*] You try it when you've had 12 stitches. [*Laughter*] "The superfluous"—[*applause*]—thank you. All right. "To many people, the superfluous is necessary."

The theater is necessary. Dance is necessary. Song is necessary. The arts are necessary. They are a necessary part of our lives.

The men and women here tonight embody that idea. Their work has enriched our lives. It's inspired us to greatness. And tonight it is my honor to offer them the appreciation of a grateful nation.

Thank you very much, all five of you. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:14 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to David M. Rubenstein, chairman, and Michael M. Kaiser, president, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; Caroline B. Kennedy, daughter of former President John F. Kennedy; George Stevens, Jr., and Margo Lion, Cochairs, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities; and Michael Stevens, coproducer with George Stevens, Jr., Kennedy Center Honors Gala.

## Remarks at Forsyth Technical Community College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina

*December 6, 2010*

Thank you, everybody. Thank you so much. Everybody, please, everybody have a seat, have a seat. It is good to be back in North Carolina. Love North Carolina. Although, I have to say, I came down here for slightly warmer weather. [*Laughter*] What's snow doing on the ground in North Carolina? [*Laughter*] Come on, now. Anyway, it is a great honor to be with you here at Forsyth Technical Community College.

There are a few people I want to acknowledge who are just doing outstanding work. First of all, your incredibly impressive college presi-